TOURETTE'S AND RELATIONSHIPS

- Kerry Riley

WHAT IS TOURETTE'S SYNDROME

- Tourette's is a neurological condition linked to a part of the brain that controls movement. It can cause involuntary words, sounds , movements, throat clearing, blinking and/or shrugging. It will begin in childhood and can, at times ease in adulthood. Tourette's often co-occurs with ADHD and OCD.

TYPES OF TOURETTE'S

Tourette's presents in different ways.

Common Motor Tics (Movements)

- Eye blinking, squinting, eye rolling or facial grimacing
- Shoulder shrugging, jerking, or head jerks
- Tensing muscles or foot tapping
- Sudden limb movements, jumping, or kicking
- Touching objects or people repeatedly
- Twirling
- Obsecene movements or gestures (coprolalia)
- Repeating other peoples gestures (echopraxia)
- Abdominal tensing

Common Vocal Tics (Sounds)

- Throat clearing, sniffing, or coughing
- Grunting, humming, or barking sounds
- Repeating sounds, words, or phrases (echolalia)
- Swearing or saying obscene words (coprolalia), which is rare but distinctive
- Whistling
- Tongue clicking
- Grunting
- Animal sounds
- Uttering words or phrases out of context

CAN TOURETTE'S BE SURPRESSED?

Although tics are involuntary, many people are able to suppress their tics for a short time. A helpful way of understanding this is to compare it to blinking. For a short period of time it is possible to keep your eyes wide open and avoid blinking – and with practice you will get better at doing it for longer – but eventually you will have to blink as the urge is too strong to control. Suppressing tics works in the same way. It can take a great measure of concentration – especially to begin with – to resist the urge to tic, but with practice a certain level of control can be applied. Some people will be able to suppress their tics more easily than others.

It is quite common for children with tourette's to suppress their tics at school, yet families will notice a marked increase in their child's tics once they get home. This is likely to be a result in the change of environment. School is very structured and has reinforcers that may make a child want to control their tics. In comparison home life is more relaxed and therefore helps children to feel at ease with expressing their tics.

PHYSICAL PAIN WITH TOURETTE'S

- Repetitive or forceful motor tics (like neck jerking, shoulder shrugging, jaw clenching, or punching motions) can lead to
- muscle strain
- headaches or migraines
- neck, back, or joint pain
- Vocal tics (throat clearing, coughing) can cause throat soreness or hoarseness
- Holding in tics (suppression) can cause muscle tension, discomfort, or exhaustion
- Over time, frequent tics may lead to chronic pain, especially in the neck and shoulders

RELATIONSHIPS

Tourette's can affect people in different ways rangeing from lower impact to massive implications.

- Communication
- Emotional impact
- Misunderstanding
- Associated conditions

Communication challenges

•Motor or vocal tics may interrupt conversations or make social situations feel awkward.
•Partners, friends, or family members who don't understand Tourette syndrome may misinterpret tics as intentional behavior, rudeness, or signs of disinterest.
•A person with Tourette syndrome may feel self-conscious about their symptoms and avoid certain social situations.

Emotional impact

•Constantly managing symptoms or worrying about others' reactions can be exhausting.Anxiety, frustration, embarrassment, or low self-esteem may affect how comfortable someone feels in relationships.
•Partners may sometimes feel unsure about how to respond to tics, especially if they are new to the condition.

Misunderstandings about symptoms

•Some tics can involve sounds, words, movements, or touching objects. Without understanding the condition, others may take these behaviors personally.
•A small minority of people with Tourette syndrome experience symptoms such as involuntary socially inappropriate words or gestures, which can create additional relationship stress.
•Associated conditions
•Many people with Tourette syndrome also experience conditions such as:

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Anxiety disorders
- Depression

These associated conditions can sometimes have a greater effect on relationships than the tics themselves, influencing attention, emotional regulation, organization, or stress levels.

Tourette syndrome affects people in very different ways, but it's best understood as a neurological condition that causes involuntary movements and sounds called tics. These tics can be simple (like blinking or throat-clearing) or more complex (like repeating words or certain movements).

How it affects daily life depends heavily on severity, context, and whether someone has other conditions alongside it.

In mild cases, people might have tics that come and go and are only mildly disruptive. They may not even need treatment, though they might feel self-conscious in social settings. Stress, excitement, fatigue, or anxiety can make tics more noticeable, which is often frustrating because the person doesn't have full control over when they happen.

In more moderate or severe cases, tics can interfere with everyday activities like writing, concentrating in class or work, speaking clearly, or sleeping. Some people describe a "build-up" feeling before a tic (called a premonitory urge), which is relieved only after the tic happens—this can make suppressing them uncomfortable and mentally exhausting.

There are also common associated conditions that can affect life more than the tics themselves, such as attention difficulties, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, anxiety, or learning challenges. These can influence school performance, work stress, and social confidence.

Social impact is a big part of many people's experience. Because tics can be misunderstood, individuals may face unwanted attention, teasing, or stigma. That can lead to avoiding certain situations or feeling anxious in public. On the other hand, many people develop coping strategies, supportive environments, and strong self-advocacy skills over time.

Treatment isn't always necessary, but when it is, it can include behavioural therapies (like habit reversal training), psychological support, and sometimes medication. Support tends to focus on reducing how disruptive tics are rather than trying to eliminate them completely.

Overall, the condition doesn't define a person's abilities or potential, but it can shape how they navigate attention, stress, and social environments day to day.